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AFRICA

The legacy of “witch-hunts” continue

 By **Star Bustamonte** | December 9, 2021

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Editorial Note: TWH uses quotations on “witches,” “witchcraft,” and “witch-hunt” to denote there appears no association with modern Pagan or Witchcraft practices. The victims of “witch-hunts” are usually not Pagans, Witches, or practicing any spiritual practice typically considered Pagan.

Content warning: Graphic depictions of violence

TWH – In late July the [Human Rights Council of the United Nations adopted a resolution focused on eliminating accusations of “witchcraft” and ritual attacks](#) but attacks, assaults, and murders continue to occur within African and other countries around the globe.

Last month, 74-year-old Silifatu Olawale, who is homeless and found to be mentally challenged, [was rescued from a mob that intended to lynch her](#) for practicing what they believed to be “witchcraft” in the Nigerian, Oyo State’s capital city of Ibadan.

Alhaja Kafilat Olayiwola Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Inclusion told reporters, “... about two weeks ago, we received an urgent call about an unclad woman in front of the state secretariat main entrance gate who was wrongfully accused of being a witchcraft thereby leading to serious beating, we swung into action immediately and rescue her from being lynched by the angry mob.”

She continued, “We took her to one of our centres for adequate care and protection and thank God that today, the State government has rehabilitated her and she now in her stable mind to return to her family hale and hearty.”

While Olawale’s story has a seemingly happy ending, the same is not true for many others.

In the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, and the Bhagmaravalasa village within the Visakhapatnam district (formerly known as Vizagapatam district) [three men were murdered](#) after Gollori Dombu fell sick and believed that Killo Komati and his family were “Tonhi,” a term that means practicing “witchcraft.”

Dombu and his family members attacked and murdered Killo Komati, and severely injured his two sons, Balaram and Bhagwan Komati. In retaliation, Komati’s family attacked and murdered Dombu and his son, Subba Rao.

In South Africa, 59-year-old Jostina Sangweni, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia, was murdered in the Mapetla, Soweto township of Johannesburg in March. She was assaulted and set on fire by a mob who believed she was a “witch, and later died from her injuries in the hospital.

The case [brought international outrage](#) and even eventually two people. Collen Sello

the case brought international outrage, and even eventually the people, Sena Sena, 27, and Taelo Dipholo, 28, were charged with the crime and continue to be held without bail. An unnamed third person involved in the killing has recently been taken into custody, but their arraignment was rescheduled last week due to court employee testing positive for COVID-19, they are expected back in court later this week.

These recent reports are just a sampling of the murders that continue to be perpetrated against women, and men, many of whom have some form of mental illness.

Meanwhile, in Ghana, the debate continues over what to do with the six "witch camps" which provide a safe haven for over 1,000 women and some 700 children. Professor Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman, 2020 Vice Presidential Candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) made an appeal to the country's government to resolve the conditions that necessitate the need for the camps.



Health facility in the Gambaga "witch" camp in Ghana – Image credit: AbdulFatawu18 – CC BY-SA 4.0

In her statements during her recent visit to the Leli Dabari camp in the Gushegu Municipal, Opoku-Agyeman said, "As a woman, I feel their pain and worry and, therefore, plead with the government to come to the aid of these women. Together let us disband this camp and move them back home to join their families. This practice has become an indictment on the conscience of our society."

"Let us not get to a level where we think this is acceptable. Wherever we are, we must join forces to bring an end to this barbaric act," she stressed.

She concluded with, "We need to raise public awareness through public education and find lasting solutions, because these conditions make mockery of long life which is a blessing. Everyone must help get out of this trap – government, community, family, everyone has a role to play."

The conditions in the camps are often destitute, with limited access to food and water, and survivor accusations of living in very small mud huts.

Sadly, it is currently the only option for those who have been accused of being "witches," since to return to their own villages would result in beatings, torture, and death.





A view of part of the huts within the Gambaga "witch" camp – Image credit: Salifu Memunatu – CC BY-SA 4.0

The Ghanaian government has struggled to find a solution that would end the need for the camps, end the practice of "witchcraft" beliefs and accusations, and ensure the safety of the women most vulnerable.

The influence of the beliefs that drive such accusations and violent attacks is not limited to countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Indian states.

Recently the London Metropolitan Police announced officers would begin new training to better help them recognize child abuse that is related to "witchcraft" beliefs. This announcement follows over two decades of increase in cases of children suffering abuse due to a belief in "witchcraft" or that the child is possessed.



Flag of the London Metropolitan Police

One of the most well-known cases was the **abuse, torture, and murder of Victoria Climbié in 2000**, by her aunt Marie Thérèse Kouao and aunt's boyfriend, Carl Manning in the town of Tottenham in the north London Borough of Haringey. Climbié's parents thought by sending her to the U.K., she would have a happier life with more opportunities than if she stayed with them in the Ivory Coast. Instead, the move to the U.K. resulted in her death.

Police officers often lack the specific training to detect abuse cases when there are cultural factors in play that are frequently complicated and mistaken or confused with other issues.

"Cases are often missed or misdiagnosed. "Practitioners may not recognise the risk of harm involved, chalking up these accusations to mental health problems or delusion," **Inspector Allen Davis told the BBC.**

"We need a concerted and co-ordinated response, where this issue is 'championed' locally so that it ceases to be viewed as a taboo issue and hidden harm," Allen continued.

"Despite its complexity and the cultural sensitivities involved, we need to mainstream our response and ensure professionals are confident to discuss beliefs in a careful but direct and professionally curious manner," he concluded.

The effort to provide more training to officers is supported and coordinated with the London Borough of Redbridge, Chester, and Cambridge universities, and Barnardo's National Female Genital Mutilation Centre.

Authorities also made a point to differentiate between beliefs surrounding "witchcraft" as it relates and is defined in abuse cases, and Pagan practices like Wicca, which is

recognized as a religion and includes the practice of Witchcraft as a positive aspect of the belief system.

The U.N. Human Rights Council's resolution [condemning the harmful practices associated with accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks \(HPAWR\)](#) is a step in the right direction, as is the new training for London police officers.

As HPAWR makes clear, until education, healthcare that includes mental health, and changes to justice systems making them more robust and better able to address human rights abuses become the standard, the legacy of "witch-hunts" will continue.

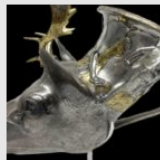
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ABOUT STAR BUSTAMONTE



Star Bustamonte serves as News Editor for The Wild Hunt, and drawing on over 25 years of reading tarot, writes the weekly Tarot card of the week feature. She is a Pagan of an eclectic origin, serves on the Circle of Council for Mother Grove Goddess Temple, and is the Chief Bottle Washer and Lightning Bug Herder for Mystic South Conference. Left to her own devices, she would stay home reading books and drinking Guinness and trying to prevent her cats from getting their grubby little paws on things they shouldn't-like wine. She lives with her long suffering husband, who miraculously still loves her.

[More by Star](#)

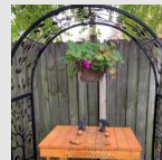


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Marc Rhodes-Taylor · 3 days ago

what a sad world we live in that such terrible things are still happening, and how lucky we are that they do not happen to us

2 ^ | v · Share



Baruch Dreamstalker · 3 days ago

[London a]uthorities also made a point to differentiate between beliefs surrounding "witchcraft" [...] and Pagan practices like Wicca

This, at least, is a spot of good news.

More depressing are parallels with America. Both involve mental health crises. In Africa and India, they are killed by mobs and are largely women. In America they are shot by police and are mostly Black.

I wish the Ghanaian government good fortune in eradicating beliefs about "witchcraft." And the same for American efforts dealing with beliefs that the 2020 election was stolen.

1 ^ | v · Share



NeoWayland → Baruch Dreamstalker · 3 days ago

Please tell me that you are not conflating torture, assault, murder, and persecution with an American election.

^ | v · Share



Lokisgodhi → NeoWayland · 3 days ago

Seriously. After all the years of reading his comments here, you expect him not to make a post like that?

^ | v 1 · Share



NeoWayland → Lokisgodhi · 2 days ago · edited

I had hoped. But he hasn't responded yet.

sighs This *isn't* about mental illness and it's certainly not about an American election.

Drawing those connections **cheapens** what people are going through. Using these disasters to "make" an argument about domestic politics when those people don't live in the US and are struggling under violence, that's beyond tasteless.

Exploiting their tragedy to score politically is inexcusable.

^ | v · Share ›



Baruch Dreamstalker → NeoWayland · 2 days ago

A mentally ill Black man shot dead by an American cop is just as dead as a mentally ill "witch" woman killed by a mob in Africa or India. You are belittling the American victims. (And gaslighting.)

^ | v · Share ›



Baruch Dreamstalker → NeoWayland · 2 days ago

I am saying that belief in "the steal" is no less firmly embedded in many American minds than "witchcraft" beliefs are in Ghanaian minds.

Sorry if that treads on your corns and those of Lokisgodhi.

And I am not paralleling torture, assault, murder and persecution with an election. I am saying all that was lurking below the surface of January 6th, and still is. If you are too thick to see that, it's your problem.

^ | v · Share ›



NeoWayland → Baruch Dreamstalker · 2 days ago

You've got issues and you're way out of line here. Any further discussion with you on this point only makes it worse. I'm done with you on this thread.

^ | v · Share ›



MarkofCain → Baruch Dreamstalker · 3 days ago · edited

That's a remarkably offensive and stupid comparison. This article details the ongoing horrific abuse, torture and murder of potentially thousands of women and children around the world. WTF has that got to do with Yank politics???

1 ^ | v · Share ›



Baruch Dreamstalker → MarkofCain · 2 days ago

Read my reply to NeoWayland.

^ | v · Share ›



MarkofCain → Baruch Dreamstalker · 3 days ago · edited

To my American Pagan brothers and sisters. Could you please, *please*, remember that there are Pagans, and people in general, elsewhere in the world? That the US is not the centre of the world, and US politics is not the definition of political issues for everyone else in the world? I'm sorry that you elected a brain-dead bumbling buffoon for a President in 2016. But seriously, get over it. If you are ever ruled by an Idi Amin, a Stalin, a Mao, or Gods forbid an actual Hitler, then you'll have something serious to complain about. Until then, be thankful that you're a first world country with a still more or less functioning democracy. Cripes, you're the wealthiest country on the planet. You can't be that unhappy. Please have a serious thought for the kinds of issues and the kinds of real poverty, deprivation and oppression people elsewhere have to suffer, as this sad article details.

And please, on behalf of non-American Pagans and Witches elsewhere in the world, please remember that we exist and not all of us want to hear about your issues all the bloody time?

2 ^ | v · 1 · Share ›



Andrea Joy, Wiccan Clergy → MarkofCain · 3 days ago

It would be a wonderful world where we in the United States got over ourselves. Our meta-story want to put is in the center of everything, which we are not.

In this specific case the thing to focus on is the issue. People, mostly women, are being killed for being 'witches'. That is horrific. May the governments of those countries have success in educating people so that we all may see a little kinder world.

2 ^ | v · Share ›



Lokisgodhi → Andrea Joy, Wiccan Clergy · 3 days ago

Why would think they're not educating them to be doing exactly what they're doing now?

^ | v · Share ›



Andrea Joy, Wiccan Clergy → Lokisgodhi · 2 days ago

Why do you think that they are?

^ | v · Share ›



Baruch Dreamstalker → MarkofCain · 2 days ago

I gave this comment a down-vote because it would be completely appropriate as a general statement but not as reply to mine.

^ | v · Share ›



Baruch Dreamstalker · 2 days ago

I am frankly appalled at comments rejecting parallels with Third World "witch" murders and events in the United States.

That, Mark of Cain and Andrea Joy, is truly centering the United States, by exempting it from criticism. A Trump trope, btw.

^ | v · Share ›

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